

Silk Court Ladies and Gents

Keara Stewart



EVELYN



MARY

These drawings are from a series titled *Silk Court Ladies and Gents*. The drawings were made during, and in response to, afternoons spent with residents at Silk Court Care Home, Tower Hamlets, London. They were exhibited at the London College of Fashion as part of the “Mirror Mirror: Representations and Reflections on Age and Ageing” conference in 2013, organized by Dr. Hannah Zeilig.

During our time at Silk Court, we aimed to explore, in a friendly, informal way, the role of clothing and dress for older people. As a starting point, Kate Munro, the artist leading the sessions, and I brought in various hats, glasses, and gloves, plus books with images of fashion from different decades that the residents had lived through. While browsing through the books together, I asked some of the residents if I could draw them. Everyone I asked was happy to oblige. I gave the drawings to them to keep and, through doing this, I felt a trust was built between myself as an outsider and the residents.

Over the coming sessions, we got to know the residents a little more and spent some time talking about clothing, favorite outfits, and what they were wearing that day. Sometimes we had music playing, and Mary,¹ one of the residents, would sing to us some of her well-loved songs from when she'd been on the stage. It was a real pleasure listening to her beautiful voice, and I could just picture her on the stage. It reminded me how powerful music can be in evoking memories and feelings of nostalgia. Helen, who, before moving to Silk Court, had lived her whole life in the surrounding area of East London, sometimes joined in singing with Mary. One afternoon, another of the residents, Evelyn, and I drew together. Evelyn drew a portrait of herself, and I drew her while she was drawing. It seemed we both really enjoyed this experience, as we spent more time laughing together than anything! The day I drew Evelyn, she was wearing a blouse with a ribbon that tied into a bow around the neck. When I told her that I had a very similar blouse, she seemed surprised, yet pleased. This is the afternoon that I'll always remember, as I felt that Evelyn and I really connected that day.

I feel very strongly that I gained in my artistic practice by working

with the residents at Silk Court. They allowed me to listen to their stories, one of which was deeply personal, and I considered this a real privilege.

NOTES

¹Residents' names have been changed.

Keara Stewart's interests as an artist lie in the untold narratives of people and architecture, capturing moments and memories, and finding the beauty and often the humor in everyday life. She is particularly engaged with art that crosses over with health and medicine, as well as graphic novels, comics, and zine culture. Readers may write to Keara Stewart at kearabazstewart@gmail.com.

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